

Xander Bogaerts has excelled on postseason stage

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/AP photo / Jeff Roberson

Xander Bogaerts hits an RBI single during the eighth inning of Game Three.

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BOSTON -- [Xander Bogaerts](#) will bat seventh for the Red Sox in Wednesday night's Game Six. He won't be batting seventh much longer.

This postseason, Bogaerts hasn't just emerged as a better option at third base than [Will Middlebrooks](#); he's become one of Boston's most important bats at any position. And that breakthrough can have a cascading influence on the team's offseason plans.

Behind [David Ortiz](#)'s otherworldly performance in this World Series, Bogaerts has been the Red Sox's best hitter in the Fall Classic. Entering Wednesday's Game Six, Bogaerts is 5-for-17 (.294) in the series. Better yet, he's 5-for-11 since a hitless first two games.

"Baseball is a game of up and downs," Bogaerts said after Game Two. "I've been up, now I'm down. I'll bounce back definitely."

His numbers are even better in the playoffs as a whole. In 11 postseason games, Bogaerts is hitting .348 with a .467 on-base percentage. Four of his eight hits have gone for extra bases. Only Ortiz has better numbers across the slash line. Only Ortiz has more walks.

Perhaps what's been most startling about Bogaerts' postseason performance has been that poise at the plate. He's walked in an even 20 percent of his playoff plate appearances -- or better than the 18.6 percent posted this regular season by major-league leader, Joey Votto. "The one thing that Xander has shown in the brief opportunities that he has had is a consistent approach," manager John Farrell said when he first put Bogaerts in the starting lineup. "He's mature beyond his years," said [Jacoby Ellsbury](#). "He's done a tremendous job getting thrown into a big environment like he has. He's had some big at-bats for us where he's drawn walks, had some big hits."

All this from a player whose lack of plate discipline was just about his only weakness coming into the season.

"That's something he's taken on in the beginning of the year, and he's really done an unbelievable job of it," assistant general manager Mike Hazen said after Bogaerts' walk sparked a rally in the Division Series. "You don't see young guys move up levels and control the strike zone usually. In the time we've been here, I've never seen a guy work on that skill and do as well as he's done in such a short period of time."

Throughout the postseason, Bogaerts has shown an impressive ability to adjust between performances and between at-bats. After popping up to end Game One of the American League Championship Series against Joaquin Benoit, Bogaerts was confident he'd do better the next time around.

"If I get him back, I'll probably do damage to him because I probably know what he has now," the 21-year-old said.

He made good on his word. When he saw Benoit again in Game Four of the series, he ripped a ground-rule double to right.

Or witness what Bogaerts did Monday night against Adam Wainwright, one of the best starters in baseball. Wainwright's earned that distinction in large part because of his curveball, widely considered the best in the game. Bogaerts struck out on that curveball the first time he saw it Monday night. When he saw it again in his third at-bat, he stayed with it for a single up the middle.

If nothing else, Bogaerts' revelatory postseason has confirmed the high opinion the Red Sox front office had of the organization's top prospect. That emergence in turn can affect the way Boston approaches free agency. The Red Sox can offer [Stephen Drew](#) a qualifying offer but feel fine if and when he rejects it. They probably don't have to find a suitable veteran to compete with Bogaerts at short in spring training. Boston can enter the spring just about certain of who Bogaerts' place in the Opening Day lineup.

Further, the Red Sox won't have to aggressively pursue a right-handed power bat, even if [Mike Napoli](#) leaves. Bogaerts can help replace some of that offensive void at short.

"I never even expected to be in the big leagues this year," Bogaerts said. "And I'm in the World Series. It's pretty special."

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